

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENNA 07822 270609Z
ACTION EUR-12

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FAS FOR GRAIN AND FEED DIV, FCA

EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAGR, CZ
SUBJ: CZECHOSLOVAK HARVESTING DIFFICULTIES CONTINUE

REF: VIENNA 7265

1. AGATT TRAVELLED EXTENSIVELY IN WESTERN PART OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA
AUG 23-25. HARVEST NOW IN FULL SWING WHERE WET SOIL PERMITS
MACHINES INTO FIELDS. THIS REGION USUALLY PRODUCES 50 PERCENT
OF NATION'S GRAIN CROP. STORM AND RECURRENT RAINS SINCE EARLY
AUGUST HAVE CAUSED SEVERE DAMAGE TO CROPS AND ARE NOW HAMPERING
AND DELAYING HARVESTING OPERATIONS IN LARGE AREAS. THUS FAR
NO OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT THE EXPECTED SIZE OF CZECHOSLOVAK
GRAIN CROP. . MOST REPORTS LIMITED TO PRAISING
HEROIC EFFORTS BY VARIOUS FARM ENTERPRISES FOR SAVING NATION'S
GRAIN CROP AND FOR DELIVERING QUOTAS TO STATE FUNDS.

2. MINAG OFFICIALS UNAVAILABLE FOR DISCUSSING LATEST
HARVEST SITUATION. ALL SEEMS IN FIELD TO SAVE THE OTHERWISE
GOOD GRAIN CROP. HOWEVER, KOOSPOL (FTO) OFFICIAL FAMILIAR WITH
CZECHOSLOVAK GRAIN SITUATION GAVE AGATT FOLLOWING ACCOUNT:
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3. UNTIL EARLY AUGUST EVERYTHING LOOKED GOOD FOR A 10.0 TO 10.2
MILLION TON GRAIN CROP SLIGHTLY ABOVE THE 10 MILLION TARGET.
HOWEVER HEAVY STORMS AND RECURRENT RAINS SINCE AUGUST 1 IN
AREAS WHERE HARVEST USUALLY BEGINS JUST AT THAT TIME RAPIDLY
DIMINISHING PROSPECTS TO MEET THIS GOAL.

4. ABOUT ONE-HALF OF NATION'S GRAIN CROP HAS ALREADY BEEN HARVESTED IN EASTERN PART OF THE COUNTRY WHICH CAME CLOSE TO TARGET. HOWEVER EVEN HERE YIELDS WERE 5 TO 6 PERCENT LOWER THAN DURING RECORD HARVEST OF 1976. THE BIG PROBLEM NOW IS HOW TO SAVE OTHER HALF OF NATION'S CROP. GRAIN IS RIPE OR IS RIPENING RAPIDLY BUT HEAVY LODGIN COUPLED WITH WEED INFESTATION AND ABOVE ALL WET SOIL PREVENT COMBINE OPERATIONS AND DELAY HARVESTING. THERE ARE FEARS THIS SITUATION WILL CAUSE HEAVY HARVESTING LOSSES AND REDUCE QUALITY SUBSTANTIALLY.

5. KOOSPOL OFFICIAL COULD NOT GIVE ANY QUANTITATIVE ESTIMATE FOR NATION'S GRAIN CROP. HE DID SAY HOWEVER THAT UNTIL EARLY AUGUST CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAD NO PLANS TO IMPORT GRAIN BEYOND USUAL QUANTITIES EXPECTED UNDER BARTER AGREEMENTS WITH CEMA PARTNERS. NOW SITUATION LOOKS DIFFERENT HE WOULD NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY PURCHASING WESTERN GRAIN LATER DURING YEAR, PARTICULARLY IF REPORTED RUSSIAN HARVESTING DIFFICULTIES IN UKRAINIA CONTINUE.

6. COMMENT. VISUAL OBSERVATIONS OF FIELDS TEND TO CONFIRM CZECHOSLOVAK HARVESTING PROBLEMS IN MANY AREAS. HEAVILY LODGED FIELDS WITH RIPE GRAIN HAS BEEN A FREQUENT SIGHT DURING TRIP AND WHERE HARVESTING OPERATIONS FINALLY WERE ABLE TO START GREEN SWATH LEFT BEHIND MACHINES SHOWED EVIDENCE OF HEAVY WEED INFESTATION. OTHER FIELDS SHOWED OVER-RIPENED GRAIN STALKS LAYING IN THE FIELD WITH EVIDENCE THAT THE PROCESS OF DETERIORATION OF QUALITY HAS ALREADY SET IN.
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7. IT IS DIFFICULT TO COME FORWARD WITH ANY MEANINGFUL ESTIMATE ON THE SIZE OF THE GRAIN CROP AT THIS TIME. ONE CAN NOT YET SPEAK OF DISASTER BUT IT LOOKS NOW THAT PRODUCTION WILL NOT MEET THE 10 MILLION TONS TARGET. MOREOVER THERE IS LIKELIHOOD 1977 GRAIN CROP WILL BE OF POOR QUALITY. WOLF

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